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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001151

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)
SUBJECT: MDC LEADER TSVANGIRAI ON THE WAY FORWARD

REF: HARARE 1136 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political section chief Matt Harrington.
Reasons: 1.5 (B) and (D).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: MDC President Morgan Tsvangirai told us his party is pursuing a four-pronged strategy in the election aftermath: participating in the (now stalled) inter-party dialogue; challenging the election result in court; organizing mass action; and encouraging increased international pressure on the Mugabe regime. President Obasanjo reportedly told the MDC the talks would continue despite ZANU-PF's request for a suspension, even if he had to travel to Harare personally. Tsvangirai is skeptical the court case will result in overturning the election result, but will expose the fraudulent tactics the ruling party employed to win. The party's supporters are waiting for Tsvangirai's word to proceed with strikes and peaceful

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demonstrations, but the MDC leader wants to ensure the timing is right before giving such an instruction. Tsvangirai acknowledged that some radical elements have encouraged the party to engage in violent resistance, but he claims to have discouraged them and appears genuinely committed to peaceful change. End Summary.

Inter-party talks

[¶2.](#) (C) In a May 14 breakfast with MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, the Ambassador, joined by polchief, asked about

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the opposition's thinking on the way forward. Tsvangirai replied that the MDC is pursuing a four-pronged strategy focused on increasing the pressure on President Mugabe and ZANU-PF. The first element is the (stalled) inter-party dialogue. Tsvangirai expressed his belief that Mugabe had instructed his negotiating team to pull back because he feared he would not be able to control where the talks led. He reported that Nigerian President Obasanjo had told MDC Vice-President Gibson Sibanda several days before in Abuja that the talks would go on even if Obasanjo had to travel personally to Harare to make that happen. Although the facilitators are trying to convince ZANU-PF to reverse its position, the MDC, he said, is now operating on the assumption that the talks will not resume. To reengage, the MDC would have to be convinced that the ruling party was sincere about making progress, and did not insist on preconditions for dialogue. "Look," Tsvangirai stressed, "I've come under significant pressure for participating in these talks at all," given the serious doubts about Mugabe's legitimacy. "Many of our supporters are afraid we're going to get hoodwinked." (Comment: later on May 14, the Nigerian High Commissioner told us the facilitators are actively pressing for resumption of the talks and were scheduled to meet with President Mugabe at noon. They were strung along by the ruling party side without a definitive answer most of May 13.)

Legal challenge

[¶3.](#) (C) The second element of the MDC's post-election strategy is the recently-filed court challenge of the election results. ZANU-PF, he said, seems at a loss as to how to respond. He is dubious that the election result will be overturned, asking "who would have the courage to deliver such a ruling?" The real value of the legal case, however, is that it provides a public forum for the exposure of the ruling party's electoral tactics.

Mass action

[¶4.](#) (C) Ultimately, Tsvangirai thought peaceful mass action in the form of strikes and demonstrations might be the most effective course of action. He noted that he has been holding well-attended rallies around the country, where the crowds have pressed hard for the party to "do something" to

stanch the continued political and economic decline. The Ambassador asked whether the MDC would lead such an effort, or whether it would be more appropriate or effective for an organization such as the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) to be in the forefront. The MDC is the appropriate actor, he replied, as the Zimbabwean crisis is caused by broad political and economic issues and is not, at its core, a labor problem. People around the country are waiting for his word to launch mass action, Tsvangirai said, but he wants to ensure the timing is right. Asked whether such action could be imminent, the MDC leader replied in the affirmative.

(Note: Tsvangirai's special advisor, Gandi Mudzingwa, told us several days earlier that mass action could begin as early as late May. End Note.)

International pressure

15. (C) Continued international pressure on the Mugabe regime is crucial to a positive resolution of the crisis here, Tsvangirai insisted. Targeted sanctions were helpful, and he

SIPDIS urged that those measures currently in place be broadened and toughened. The degree of international attention on Zimbabwe would also be an important factor in the timing of mass action. Tsvangirai said he wanted to avoid giving the instruction to proceed if the international community was, at that moment, consumed by major developments or crises in another part of the world.

Paramilitary planning

16. (C) The Ambassador told Tsvangirai that some people -- most of them outside the MDC's formal party structure -- have, in recent conversations with us, advocated an unconventional paramilitary campaign against the government. Such an approach, he warned, could give the government the excuse it has long sought to crush the MDC. It would also have little prospect of success, since the instruments of force are overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of the ruling party. The Ambassador said we had strongly discouraged these interlocutors from engaging in such activity and he hoped that Tsvangirai would do the same if approached. The MDC leader replied that every party contains radical elements, and he acknowledged that some had urged him to pursue the road of violent resistance. He said that some ex-Rhodesians who wanted the MDC to adopt their violent ideas were also being turned aside. Tsvangirai agreed that such an approach could have disastrous consequences and, despite criticism from some quarters that he is a weak leader, continues to believe in and press for peaceful change.

Less violence, but more discrimination in food distribution

17. (C) Tsvangirai believed that violence against MDC supporters in rural areas has begun to ease. His primary worry in rural areas is the political manipulation of food, particularly that MDC supporters are being denied access to scarce food supplies controlled by the government's Grain Marketing Board.

Comment

18. (C) Tsvangirai did not seem disappointed by ZANU-PF's reluctance to continue with the inter-party dialogue. He had low expectations anyway, and ZANU-PF's apparent intransigence can only help the MDC's diplomatic efforts to ramp up the pressure on the Mugabe regime. However, if the facilitators convince the ruling party to come back to the table, the MDC will feel immense pressure to follow suit, notwithstanding Tsvangirai's rejection of preconditions. The opposition

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party has been working actively with its structures around the country to organize mass action, but it is not clear to us how successful those efforts have been. MDC rallies have had good turnouts for a non-election period. We believe Tsvangirai remains convinced for now that peaceful resistance

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is the best way to effect positive change and we will continue to strongly counsel him in this direction.
SULLIVAN